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# On Editing The Merry Muses

Valentina Bold

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## On Editing *The Merry Muses*

Valentina Bold

Among my recent projects has been introducing a new version for Luath Press of *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*, as originally edited in 1959 by James Barke, Sydney Goodsir Smith and J. DeLancey Ferguson.<sup>1</sup> The topic is especially appropriate for a volume honouring Ross Roy, given his own research on *The Merry Muses*, in articles for *Studies in Scottish Literature* and *Burns Chronicle*, as well as in his introduction to a facsimile from the extremely rare first edition in the Roy Collection.<sup>2</sup>

From the point of view of its editors, *The Merry Muses* offers singular challenges. The new Luath edition includes the introductory essays and headnotes by Barke, Smith and Ferguson, along with Smith's glossary, which first appeared in the 1964 American edition. Three illustrations from the 1959 edition are omitted, but this loss is more than compensated for by evocative new illustrations from Bob Dewar. For the first time, too, the music for the songs by Burns is included: this fulfils the original desire of the 1959

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is condensed from my introduction to the *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*, ed. James Barke and Sydney Goodsir Smith, with a prefatory introduction by J. DeLancey Ferguson (Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2009), and my "On editing *The Merry Muses*," Robert Burns International Conference, University of Glasgow, January 2009.

<sup>2</sup> G. Ross Roy, "The Merry Muses of Caledonia," *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 2:4 (April 1965), 208-212; "The '1827' edition of Robert Burns's *Merry Muses of Caledonia*," *Burns Chronicle*, 4th ser. 9 (1986): 32-45; ed. and intro., *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*, 1799 (Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1999).

editors, thwarted because of Barke's untimely death. What I tried to do is to complement the work of Barke, Smith and Ferguson, partly by discussing the development of their edition, and partly by revisiting the peculiar history and characteristics of *The Merry Muses*.

I came to realise that *The Merry Muses* has, in many ways, a life and a validity of its own, independent of its authors and editors. Although associated with Burns from an early stage in its life, as is well known, it was first published after Burns's death and without his approval. Nor is there any extant proof he personally amassed these items with the intention to publish. Only certain of the texts, as the 1959 editors note, are verifiably Burns's, or collected by Burns, because of their existence in manuscript, or publication elsewhere. While some of *The Merry Muses* is indisputably by Burns, collected and amended by him, many more items were bundled into nineteenth-century editions by their editors in an attempt to add weight by association with Burns. However, a cautionary note should be raised: even if the texts indisputably passed through Burns's hands, they were designed for private consumption. This is not Burns as he might have wished to be remembered or at his most polished.

Previous editors worked from the premise that the value of *The Merry Muses* was in rounding off the poet's corpus, allowing readers to appreciate the range of Burns's output as songwriter and collector. The contents, too, were supposed to represent Burns as we hope he was: openly sexual, raucously humorous, playful yet empathetic to women. Seen from that viewpoint, *The Merry Muses* offers tantalising glimpses of Burns's poetry at its rawest and bawdiest, at the extreme end of his love lyrics. These are texts which require imaginative readjustments on the part of the twenty-first century reader, particularly for those who are unfamiliar with the bawdy or its modern erotic equivalents. Burns, as Barke emphasises, was working within a rich and varied tradition of bawdry, in written and oral forms, in Scotland and beyond. Bearing these factors in mind, it becomes possible to appreciate the songs in context: for their good humour, verbal playfulness, and disrespectfulness towards standard social mores.

Seen in this way, *The Merry Muses* represents the worldview of the eighteenth-century drinking club, like that of its first apparent editors, the Crochallan Fencibles, a group of carousing companions who met in Dawney Douglas's tavern in Edinburgh.<sup>3</sup> The Crochallan group were, perhaps, less practically sexual than other, more colourful organisations—the Beggar's Benison, for instance, or the Wig Club—but they certainly enjoyed erotic and bawdy songs.<sup>4</sup> Members included William Dunbar (d.1807), its presiding officer and also a member, like Burns, of the Canongate Kilwinning Lodge of Freemasons; Charles Hay (1747-1811), Lord Newton, the group's "major and muster-master-general;" and Robert Cleghorn (d.1798?), who was particularly involved with the 'cloaciniad' verses. Burns refers to his membership in writing, for instance, to Peter Hill, in a letter of February 1794 (Roy, II: 278). Perhaps Burns sought to flatter his friends by hinting at their gentlemanly broad-mindedness when, as Ferguson notes, he circulated bawdy items in letters, as to Provost Maxwell of Lochmaben, or by lending his 'collection', to people like John McMurdo of Drumlanrig. Burns was also indicating his own status as a gentlemanly collector, linked (in a 'cloaciniad' way) to his enthusiastic role in the *Scots Musical Museum*. It is in the context of the "fraternal" enjoyment of the bawdry, to quote Robert Crawford, that *The Merry Muses* must be viewed.<sup>5</sup>

A related factor which has to be considered with *The Merry Muses*, too, is that it is primarily a collection of songs for performance rather than designed to be read silently; this was something, as an editor, that I found challenging. With the exception of one or two items designed for recitation, this is a collection which really comes to life when it is used as it was originally presented: 'for use' as a source text for singers.

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<sup>3</sup> See the subtitle of the 1799 edition: *A Collection of Favourite Scots Songs, Ancient and Modern; Selected for use of the Crochallan Fencibles*.

<sup>4</sup> See David Stevenson, *Beggar's Benison: Sex Clubs of Enlightenment Scotland* (East Linton: Tuckwell, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> Robert Crawford, ed., *Robert Burns & Cultural Authority* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1999), 13.

In my introduction, I consider modern performances including Ewan MacColl's *Songs from Robert Burns's Merry Muses of Caledonia* (1962); Gill Bowman, Tich Frier, and others' *Robert Burns—The Merry Muses* (1996); Jean Redpath's recordings with Serge Hovey; and the groundbreaking Linn series of *The Complete Songs of Robert Burns*.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the volume's reputation, the *Merry Muses* songs are a relatively tame group of texts. They are heterosexual in orientation, describing consensual sex in familiar positions, and with a strong focus on male and female genitalia. They operate according to their own rules: they are rhythmic, mimicking the actions they describe; they use easily-understood euphemisms for sexual experiences. There is the statement, for instance, in 'Ye Hae Lien Wrang Lassie,' based on farming experiences (like many of the metaphors), "Ye've let the pounie o'er the dyke, / And he's been in the corn, lassie." So, too, obvious images are used: the "chanter pipe" of "John Anderson My Jo," or the women's "dungeons deep" in "Act Sederunt of the Session." Some songs, of course, are more explicit, like "My Girl She's Airy," expressing a longing, "For her a, b, e, d, and her c, u, n, t." *The Merry Muses* is, too, a self-conscious display of ability in diverse poetic styles, within the context of bawdry. In "Act Sederunt of the Session," for instance, satirical techniques suggest the ridiculousness of contemporary kirk attitudes to sex, and "Ode to Spring" uses bawdy mock-pastoral.

If the songs sometimes seem simple, the textual history of the collection is extremely complicated. This was something

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<sup>6</sup> Ewan MacColl, *Songs from Robert Burns's Merry Muses of Caledonia*. Sung by Ewan MacColl. Edited and annotated by Kenneth S. Goldstein. np: Dionysus, 1962. D1; Gill Bowman, Tich Frier et al, *Robert Burns—The Merry Muse* (Glasgow: Iona Records, 1996) IRCDo35; Redpath, Jean, *Songs of Robert Burns*. Arranged by Serge Hovey, 7 vols. First published 1976-1990. Rereleased on 4 CDs (USA: Rounder; Cockenzie: Greentrax, 1990-1996). CDTRAX 029, 114-16; *Robert Burns. The Complete Songs*. 12 vols. Various artists. Ed. Fred Freeman (Glasgow: Linn Records, 1995-2002). Linn Records CDK 047, 051, 062, 083, 086, 099, 107, 143, 156, 199, 200 and 201.

that held up the Luath edition, while I came (perhaps not fully, even yet) to an understanding of it. Although many, or most, of its texts were no doubt familiar to the Crochallans, *The Merry Muses* was not itself published until three years after Burns's death, in 1799. The 1799 volume has no reference or attribution to Burns in the book itself, and obviously a posthumous publication was published without his own involvement. However, *The Merry Muses* was linked to the poet through his association with the Crochallans. According to literary legend, the 1799 volume was compiled after Burns's death, based on a manuscript inveigled out of the grieving Jean Armour.<sup>7</sup> This manuscript is no longer extant, or at least its location is unknown; in 1959 DeLancey Ferguson revised his earlier opinion that it might have been destroyed. Related to this, the 1799 edition was long thought to have been published in Dumfries; modern scholars, including Ferguson, think it more likely that it was published in Edinburgh.

Moreover, until the later nineteenth century, and not conclusively until the publication of the 1959 edition, the existence of the 1799 Crochallan volume was itself little more than rumour. The one copy occasionally available to late nineteenth-century editors, such as William Scott Douglas and, later, W.H. Ewing, was that which passed through the hands of William Craibe Angus and which, by 1959, was in the personal collection of the former Liberal Prime Minister, the Earl of Rosebery. The Rosebery copy, which is very slightly damaged, lacks a date, and so the only way of dating *The Merry Muses* was to use the watermarks on its paper. These placed the volume at around 1800 or earlier, until the discovery of what is now the Roy copy, dated 1799, made exact dating possible. A microfilm copy of the Rosebery copy, however, was made accessible to the 1959 editors and is in the National Library of Scotland.

The printed text has been in flux and development since its first appearance. Since 1799, up to the year 2000, *The*

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<sup>7</sup> See J. DeLancey Ferguson, "The Suppressed Poems of Burns," *Modern Philology*, 30:1 (1932), 53-60, and "Burns and *The Merry Muses*," *Modern Language Notes*, 66:7 (November 1951), 471-73.

*Merry Muses* had passed through over thirty editions or printings, with minor or major variations. There are concentrated clusters: at least seven editions which can be tentatively dated between 1900 and 1911, and a minimum of ten more, including a US printing, between 1962 and 1982. There is a gap between around 1843 and 1872 and, again, between 1930 and 1959, possibly reflecting attitudes to erotic texts, and censorship.

The 1799 volume languished in obscurity for much of the nineteenth century, with the possible exception of the possibly early 'Dublin' version, at least until the publication of the '1827' edition.<sup>8</sup> This, it has been argued by Gershon Legman and by Ross Roy, was probably published in 1872 in London for John Hotten, with the publication numerals reversed, to confuse the perceived censors.<sup>9</sup> It is difficult to be precise in tracing the '1827' text's history, but it spawned a variety of privately-published editions. Most of these appeared, in all probability, from the third quarter of the nineteenth century into the early twentieth century. It is possible that some editors directly consulted the 1799 volume, but more likely that they are a self-generating set, based on an assumed provenance going back to the Crochallans and Burns.

There are, then, multiple variants of the '1827', with more or less minor variations, and these have been ably surveyed by Ross Roy in his extremely helpful article, which updates M'Naught's earlier attempt to present the various versions of *The Merry Muses* chronologically.<sup>10</sup> Where M'Naught finds seven versions since the Crochallan edition, noting that most are related, Professor Roy identified seventeen variations, with estimated dates ranging from 1872 to 1920 (using techniques such as tracing library accession dates to determine the latest possible date of publication).

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<sup>8</sup> *The Merry Muses: a Choice Collection of Favourite Songs* (Dublin: Printed for the booksellers, [1804?]).

<sup>9</sup> See Gershon Legman *The Horn Book* (New York: University Books, 1964): 148-9, and *The Merry Muses of Caledonia* (New York: University Books, 1965): lxii.

<sup>10</sup> G. Ross Roy, as in note 2 above; D. M'Naught, "The Merry Muses of Caledonia," *Burns Chronicle*, 3 (1894): 24-45.

Over the twenty-three years since Professor Roy's article, he has acquired additional '1827' variants for the Roy Collection,<sup>11</sup> and, as he knows, there are further copies in other collections to which he did not have access at the time of the article. There is, for instance, a substantial number of editions in Edward Atkinson Hornel's collection, available for public consultation in the Hornel Library, Broughton House, Kirkcudbright. Hornel was assisted in purchasing these items by James Cameron Ewing, and their correspondence relating to the building of this collection is cited below. Within the Broughton House collection there are copies of Roy editions 1, 3 (with manuscript notes by J.C. Ewing), 5 and 12, along with a 'Dublin' edition of '1830[?]' and a related 'London' edition of '1843.' In January 2009, I heard of another edition which had been found in Broughton house, which I have yet to examine. The Ewart library in Dumfries also holds an '1827' edition, Roy edition 7, and a copy of the same edition is in the NLS. Several versions are now available on the internet, too, with multiple digitizations from the '1827' sequence, along with Gershon Legman's edition.<sup>12</sup>

As Professor Roy has pointed out, in editions from the '1827' sequence, items from the 1799 edition mingle with other pieces apparently by Burns and with a selection of other erotic pieces of varying quality, many of them similar to broadside literature, then in circulation, which are soon classified into sections of 'Scottish', 'English' and 'Irish' themed texts. Added at the end, too, there is a set of bawdy 'Toasts and Sentiments'. Most of this new material has nothing directly to do with Burns, and more to do with the perceived activities, and proclivities, of eighteenth-century British drinking clubs. Burns is explicitly named as author on the assumed earliest '1827' edition and thereafter. The '1827' usually includes a preface, reprinted from one edition

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<sup>11</sup> See Elizabeth Sudduth, comp., *The G. Ross Roy Collection of Robert Burns, An Illustrated Catalogue* (Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 2009): 422.

<sup>12</sup> See <http://www.drinkingsongs.net/html/books-and-manuscripts/1700-1799/1799-merry-muses-of-caledonia/index.htm>.



to the next, with occasional variations, explaining the Burns credentials, and putting the texts into bawdy context. It also includes two letters: the one from Burns to Robert Ainslie of 3rd March 1788, describing a sexual encounter with Jean Mauchline (Roy, I:251), which Barke interrogates in his essay, and his letter to James Johnson of 25th May 1788, relating to the marriage to Jean Armour (Roy, I:280). There is also a copy of the “Libel Summons” or “The Court of Equity.” It is not completely clear what all the sources for the ‘1827’ edition were: it is possible that it makes reference to the lost Burns manuscript, or to the 1799 edition, or to previously published items in some cases, or to a combination of all of these.

There are two intriguing further ‘sources’ that an editor of *The Merry Muses* needs to evaluate. The first is the Allan Cunningham manuscript copy of *The Merry Muses*, discovered by Gershon Legman but, sadly, not available to the 1959 editors (although Goodsir Smith makes reference to it in later editions). It is contained within an ‘1825 Dublin’ edition of *The Merry Muses* at the British Museum, and additional items from it are reprinted in Legman’s *The Horn Book* and discussed very fully again in his edition of *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*.<sup>13</sup> The main value of the Cunningham manuscript lies in pointing to Burns as author of some otherwise unattributable items, as Smith notes in the second edition of the Barke, Smith and Ferguson version, where certain items (as mentioned below) are transferred between sections in the book on the strength of Legman’s statements.

The second intriguing shadowy presence in the editorial story relates to the abortive edition planned by the art dealer and bibliophile William Craibe Angus (1830-1899). This was to be based on the Crochallan volume of 1799 and was to be edited by William Ernest Henley (1849-1903), using one of the two transcriptions from the 1799 edition by J.C. Ewing.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See Legman, *The Horn Book*, 129-69; Legman, *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*, particularly 271-3.

<sup>14</sup> “The Merry Muses of Caledonia,” bound volume including transcript and notes by J.C. Ewing, Andrew Carnegie Library, Dunfermline (Local Studies, 1247a).

The Craibe Angus volume, as Goodsir Smith points out, was consulted by M'Naught when he was preparing the 1911 Burns Federation edition. It played an influential role, too, for Barke and Smith in understanding the textual history of *The Merry Muses*. In my introduction to the new Luath edition, I consider the effect of Ewing's transcript on the 1959 editors, and offer observations on the way elements of it—particularly the notes on specific songs, and their provenance—influenced Barke and Ferguson. The Ewing transcript, which was drawn to the 1959 editors' attention by Maurice Lindsay, played a major role in the early preparations for the 1959 editions. Barke made a partial transcript of some of Ewing's introductory notes but, more importantly, its existence—again through the aid of Lindsay—allowed the team to establish the existence and whereabouts of what was then the only known copy of the 1799 volume.

The first edition of *The Merry Muses* that made any effort to restrict its content to Burns's own compositions, or pieces he collected, was the 1911 Burns Federation edition, compiled anonymously—under the pseudonym of 'Vindex'—by Duncan M'Naught, editor of the *Burns Chronicle*.<sup>15</sup> M'Naught's claim was to combat the misinformation in the '1827' sequence of editions, by reprinting the "Original edition," as "A Vindication of Robert Burns in connection with the above publication and the spurious editions which succeeded it." He follows the 1799 fairly closely, with minor title changes, and he includes also useful, albeit brief, headnotes; comparing these with the 1959, it can be seen that the 1959 editors made explicit reference to M'Naught and approached the text with similar interests.

My new edition for Luath preserves the integrity of Barke, Smith and Ferguson's pioneering edition. The editors presented their work in 1959 under the auspices of Sydney

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<sup>15</sup> *The Merry Muses of Caledonia (Original Edition). A Collection of Favourite Scots Songs Ancient and Modern; Selected for use of the Crochallan Fencibles* (no place of publication: the Burns Federation), 1911. See too Duncan M'Naught, "The Merry Muses of Caledonia," *Burns Chronicle* 3 (February 1894): 24-45, and "The 'Merry Muses' Again," *Burns Chronicle* 20 (1911): 105-19.

Goodsir Smith's Auk Society, for which a subscription of two guineas bought a 'free' copy, anticipating the possibility of prosecution if the work were published in the ordinary way. Ferguson, Smith and Barke were among the first editors to consider the book seriously, as a collection which included significant work by, or recorded by, Burns. Their scholarly commentary, especially in the headnotes, draws attention to the situations where the songs first appeared as well as to their contexts, and remains extremely useful. This edition groups the texts by their provenance rather than being caught up in the '1827' sequence. Perhaps paradoxically, because the 1959 editors adopted a rational system of presentation and organisation, it could be suggested that Burns might have approved.

While individual items from *The Merry Muses* had appeared, often in expurgated forms, in editions of Burns's complete poetry or works—most notably in the 1893 Aldine edition of 1893 and in the 1890 edition by William Scott Douglas<sup>16</sup>—, the 1959 editors worked primarily from such key texts as the 1799 Rosebery edition. The Rosebery copy is in itself intriguing, partly because it includes manuscript notes by William Scott Douglas, as Ewing notes in his own set of notes on this copy, now in Dunfermline's Carnegie Library; the 1959 editors made full use of this copy—often in an unacknowledged way. The 1959 team also made use of J.C. Ewing's transcription of the Rosebery volume, as well as the 1911 Burns Federation edition, and I discuss their use of these sources at length in my introduction to the Luath volume.<sup>17</sup>

Ninety-seven texts appear in the 1959 edition as compared to eighty-six in the 1799 and the omissions from the 1959 are intriguing. Sometimes it seems that a song is

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<sup>16</sup> See *The Poetical Works of Robert Burns*, ed. George A. Aitken, 3 vols (London: Aldine, 1893); William Scott Douglas, ed., *The Complete Poetical Works of Robert Burns*, 2 vols (London: Swann Sonnenschein, 1890).

<sup>17</sup> The notes on the 1799 edition match other examples of Scott Douglas's handwriting, as, e.g., his notes in NLS MS 2074. I am grateful to George Stanley of the National Library of Scotland for bringing this to my attention.

omitted for not being bawdy enough, although associated with Burns directly. For instance “Anna” (1799: 8-10), better known as “Yestreen I had a pint o’ wine,” is omitted in the 1959 edition, and so is “My Wife’s a wanton wee thing” (1799: 116-7). Other pieces are, perhaps, seen as distracting from the Burnsian emphasis of the 1959 edition and, therefore, not used. While the 1959 editors include the “Original set” of “The Mill, Mill-o” from 1779, they omit the version below it, starting “Beneath a green shade I fand a green maid” (1799: 73-4), which was in Ramsay’s *Tea-Table Miscellany* of 1724.

There were various offshoots from the 1959 edition. Smith and Ferguson oversaw a second edition, for the US market, which appeared in 1964 with G.P. Putnam’s Sons, New York. This follows the 1959 text, using the same illustrations and ordering of the texts. One substantial change, though, is that Robert Burns is now credited on the title page; also added is a glossary, by Goodsir Smith.<sup>18</sup> The New York edition takes account, too, of Gershon Legman’s recent discovery in the British Museum Library of Allan Cunningham’s manuscript, which, Smith writes, “suggests that six songs previously grouped in Section III are actually Burns originals” and indicates that “the purified versions of these in the Aldine edition of 1839 are in fact forged expurgations by Cunningham.”<sup>19</sup> The discovery affects “Ye Hae Lien Wrang,” “Comin’ O’er the Hills o’ Coupar,” “How Can I Keep my Maidenhead?,” “Wad Ye Do That?,” “There Cam a Cadger,” and “Jenny Macraw.” In the 1964 edition, however, these songs remain in Section III.

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<sup>18</sup> Robert Burns, *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*. Ed. Barke, Goodsir Smith, Ferguson (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1964). Although the glossary is not credited to Smith, its manuscript existence in the National Library of Scotland, at NLS ACC 10397/44 shows that he was the primary author, and corrector, of this.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Burns, *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*. Ed. Barke, Goodsir Smith, Ferguson (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1964): 6.

In 1965, the edition went into its third incarnation, with its third publisher, W.H. Allen, in London.<sup>20</sup> For 1965, Smith moves the six songs at question into section IV, "Collected by Burns." The notes to these songs, too, are amended accordingly. Aside from new references to Legman, however, the 1965 edition is identical to the 1959. In 1970, it was reprinted as a paperback by Panther, in London, with the same changes from 1959 as in the 1965 edition.<sup>21</sup> To round off the set with its original publisher, *The Merry Muses* came out, finally, with Macdonald, in 1982.<sup>22</sup>

Most modern editions, with various editors and publishers, and equally various titles, draw strongly on the 1959 text and its descendants. They include the unashamedly uncredited version of Barke, Smith and Ferguson's 1965 text in *Bawdy Verse and Folksongs, written and collected by Robert Burns*, described only as "introduced" by Magnus Magnusson.<sup>23</sup> The Paul Harris edition, as *The Secret Cabinet of Robert Burns*, is more skilfully edited. The selection is smaller than that in the 1959 edition, with sixty one texts in total and useful headnotes.<sup>24</sup> Other significant editions include Eric Lemuel Randall's, of 1966, which includes very full headnotes, a generalist's introductory essay, and selected illustrations.<sup>25</sup> Finally, the 1999 University of South Carolina Press facsimile edition of the Roy Collection copy of 1799, boxed with Ross Roy's authoritative introductory essay,

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<sup>20</sup> Robert Burns, *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*. Ed. Barke, Goodsir Smith, Ferguson (London: W.H. Allen, 1965).

<sup>21</sup> Robert Burns *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*. Ed. Barke, Goodsir Smith, Ferguson (London: Panther, 1966), reprinted 1970.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Burns, *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*. Ed. Barke, Goodsir Smith, Ferguson (Edinburgh: Macdonald Publishers, 1982).

<sup>23</sup> Magnus Magnusson, *Bawdy Verse and Folksongs, Written and Collected by Robert Burns* (London: Macmillan, 1982), from *The Merry Muses of Caledonia* (London: W.H. Allen, 1965).

<sup>24</sup> *The Secret Cabinet of Robert Burns. Merry Muses of Caledonia* (Edinburgh: Paul Harris, 1979).

<sup>25</sup> *The Merry Muses Illustrated*, ed. Eric Lemuel Randall (London: Luxor Press, 1966).

takes the set to its starting point, providing a reliable text for the earliest known version of *The Merry Muses*.<sup>26</sup>

The 1959 edition, ultimately, represented a labour of scholarship as well as a labour of love: the letters that passed among the three editors give some indication of the gargantuan effort involved, and one which yielded very tangible results. This edition is as much, if not more, their creation than Burns's. At the time of editing, Barke was at the height of his fame as the novelist of *The Immortal Memory of Burns*, the multi-part novel which follows the poet from birth to death. The depth of his research on Burns has still not been fully recognised.<sup>27</sup> Smith, equally, was making his reputation as a poet and editor, having recently published on Robert Fergusson's poetry.<sup>28</sup> Ferguson was the most scholarly, well respected for his Burns *Letters* and the biography *The Pride and the Passion*. Sadly, Barke died before the edition was seen through to completion. The making of the edition (which took eleven years to complete) was beset with problems, as the editorial correspondence, considered in the Luath edition, makes apparent.<sup>29</sup>

I hope that this essay has given at least a flavour of the development of *The Merry Muses* into the 1959 edition, and onwards into the new Luath version. It is a book which is complex textually, it is complicated as a song collection, and the relationship with Burns complicates things further. In spite of all of this, or because of it, *The Merry Muses of Caledonia* is ripe for scholarly and critical reassessment: as a sequence of editions that needs to be rigorously collated (perhaps minus the misleading '1827' texts) and as a set of lively songs in its own account.

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<sup>26</sup> See n. 2 above.

<sup>27</sup> There is still no major study of Barke as a novelist, or scholar on Burns; we hope in due course to publish the proceedings of the Mitchell Library's Barke centenary conference, to be edited by Valentina Bold and David Borthwick.

<sup>28</sup> Sydney Goodsir Smith, ed., *Robert Fergusson, 1750-1774* (Edinburgh: Nelson, 1952).

<sup>29</sup> See, in particular, the Barke Papers, in the Mitchell Library, Glasgow.